

IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 12-34 as originally filed without prejudice. Please amend the remaining claims as follows, substituting any amended claim(s) for the corresponding pending claim(s):

1. (amended) A fabrication method, comprising the steps of:
 - forming a dielectric structure over a contact region, the dielectric structure comprising:
 - a first layer formed from a first material; and
 - a second layer overlying the first layer and formed from a second material which may be selectively etched with respect to the first material;
 - forming and patterning a resist layer over the dielectric structure;
 - selectively etching the second layer through an opening through the patterned resist layer utilizing an etch which is selective of the first material over the second material; and
 - without stripping the resist layer, etching the dielectric structure through the opening within the patterned resist layer and any etched region within the second layer to form a contact opening extending through the dielectric structure and exposing the contact region.

Please add the following new claims:

A2 1 ~~2~~³⁵. (newly added) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of forming a dielectric structure
 2 over a contact region further comprises:
 3 forming a third layer underlying the first layer and formed from a material different than
 4 the first material.

3 1 ~~36~~². (newly added) The method of claim ~~35~~², wherein the step of forming a dielectric structure
 2 over a contact region further comprises:
 3 forming a third layer from a silicate glass doped with a gettering agent;
 4 forming the first layer of silicon nitride; and
 5 forming the second layer of borophosphosilicate glass.

4 1 ~~37~~⁴. (newly added) The method of claim 1, wherein the step of selectively etching the second
 2 layer through an opening through the patterned resist layer utilizing an etch which is selective
 3 of the first material over the second material further comprises:
 4 etching an opening through the second layer.

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1 38. (newly added) The method of claim 37, wherein the step of etching an opening through the
2 second layer further comprises:
3 utilizing a relatively isotropic etch process to etch the opening through the second layer,
4 wherein the opening through the second layer undercuts the patterned resist layer.

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1 39. (newly added) The method of claim 37, wherein the step of etching an opening through the
2 second layer further comprises:
3 utilizing a wet etch process to etch the opening through the second layer.

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1 40. (newly added) The method of claim 37, wherein the step of etching the dielectric structure
2 through the opening within the patterned resist layer and any etched region within the second
3 layer to form a contact opening extending through the dielectric structure and exposing the
4 contact region further comprises:
5 utilizing a relatively anisotropic etch process to etch a remainder of the opening
6 extending through the dielectric structure through the opening within the patterned resist layer.

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1. (newly added) The method of claim 3~~7~~⁴, wherein the step of etching the dielectric structure
through the opening within the patterned resist layer and any etched region within the second
layer to form a contact opening extending through the dielectric structure and exposing the
contact region further comprises:
utilizing a plasma etch process to etch a remainder of the opening extending through the
dielectric structure through the opening within the patterned resist layer, the patterned resist
layer masking the plasma etch process.

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1 42. (newly added) An intermediate integrated circuit structure, comprising:
2 a substrate including a contact region;
3 a dielectric structure over the substrate, the dielectric structure comprising:
4 a first layer formed from a first material; and
5 a second layer overlying the first layer and formed from a second material which
6 may be selectively etched with respect to the first material;
7 an opening through the dielectric structure and exposing the contact region, the opening
8 including
9 a first portion extending through the second layer having sloped or concave
10 sidewalls, and
11 a second portion extending through the first layer and having substantially
12 vertical sidewalls; and
13 a patterned resist layer overlying the dielectric structure, the patterned resist layer having
14 an opening therethrough over the opening through the dielectric structure.

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1 43. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim 42, wherein the
2 dielectric structure further comprises:
3 a third layer underlying the first layer and formed from a material different than the first
4 material.

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1 ~~44~~. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim ~~43~~¹⁰, wherein the first
2 layer is formed of silicon nitride, the second layer is formed of borophosphosilicate glass, and
3 the third layer is formed of a silicate glass doped with a gettering agent.

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1 ~~45~~. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim ~~43~~¹⁰, wherein the first
2 portion of the opening through the dielectric structure undercuts the patterned resist layer.

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1 ~~46~~. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim ~~43~~¹⁰, wherein the
2 opening through the dielectric structure has a Y-shaped profile.

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1 ~~47~~. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim ~~43~~¹⁰, wherein the
2 opening through the dielectric structure is wider within the first portion than the opening through
3 the patterned resist layer.

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1 ~~48~~. (newly added) The intermediate integrated circuit structure of claim ~~43~~¹⁰, wherein the
2 opening through the dielectric structure has a width within the second portion approximately
3 equal to a width of the opening through the patterned resist layer.

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1 ~~49.~~ (newly added) A method of forming a contact opening, comprising:
2 forming a dielectric structure over a contact region, the dielectric structure comprising:
3 a first layer formed from a first material; and
4 a second layer overlying the first layer and formed from a second material which
5 may be selectively etched with respect to the first material;
6 forming and patterning a resist layer over the dielectric structure;
7 selectively etching the second layer through an opening through the patterned resist layer
8 utilizing a relatively isotropic etch process which is selective of the first material over the
9 second material and which undercuts the patterned resist layer in an etched region formed by
10 the relatively isotropic etch process; and
11 without stripping the resist layer, etching the dielectric structure, utilizing a relatively
12 anisotropic etch process, through the opening within the patterned resist layer and the etched
13 region within the second layer to form a contact opening extending through the dielectric
14 structure and exposing the contact region.

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1 50. (newly added) The method of claim ~~49~~¹⁶, wherein the step of selectively etching the second
2 layer through an opening through the patterned resist layer utilizing a relatively isotropic etch
3 process which is selective of the first material over the second material and which undercuts the
4 patterned resist layer in an etched region formed by the relatively isotropic etch process further
5 comprises:

6 etching an opening through the second layer utilizing the first layer as an etch stop.

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1 51. (newly added) The method of claim ~~50~~¹⁷, wherein the step of selectively etching the second
2 layer through an opening through the patterned resist layer utilizing a relatively isotropic etch
3 process which is selective of the first material over the second material and which undercuts the
4 patterned resist layer in an etched region formed by the relatively isotropic etch process further
5 comprises:

6 wet etching the opening through the second layer utilizing hydrofluoric acid, wherein the
7 second layer is formed of a borophosphosilicate glass.

1 ~~19~~ 52. (newly added) The method of claim ~~50~~ 17, wherein the step of etching the dielectric structure,
2 utilizing a relatively anisotropic etch process, through the opening within the patterned resist
3 layer and the etched region within the second layer to form a contact opening extending through
4 the dielectric structure and exposing the contact region further comprises:
5 plasma etching a remainder of the opening through the dielectric structure through the
6 opening through the patterned resist layer and through the opening through the second layer.

1 ~~20~~ 53. (newly added) The method of claim ~~52~~ 19, wherein the step of plasma etching a remainder
2 of the opening through the dielectric structure through the opening through the patterned resist
3 layer and through the opening through the second layer further comprises:
4 masking the plasma etching process with the patterned resist layer.